



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Terence R. McAuliffe
Governor

April 29, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Through: Regional Administrator MaryAnn Tierney
FEMA Region III
615 Chestnut Street
One Independence Mall, 6th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Mr. President:

Pursuant to 44 CFR § 206.46, I am submitting this appeal of the April 1, 2016, denial of Virginia's request for a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration for the severe storm and resulting tornadoes that occurred across the Commonwealth on February 24, 2016. I am appealing the denial of FEMA Individual Assistance for Appomattox, Essex, and Sussex counties, as well as the denial of statewide Hazard Mitigation. I hope you will reconsider these decisions based on the information submitted on March 25, 2016, as well as the additional information included in this appeal. Coming directly after the fourth-largest snowstorm Virginia has seen in the past century, and after a year-long series of storm and flood events, this incident was indeed of such severity and magnitude as to be beyond the capabilities of the Commonwealth, the affected local governments, and voluntary organizations.

On February 24, 2016, a severe storm caused the formation of eight tornadoes that impacted 12 localities across the Commonwealth and took the lives of five individuals. These tornadoes also caused extensive debris and significant damage to public and private property, essential infrastructure, agriculture, and eligible non-profit organizations. This incident was unprecedented for Virginia. Never before has our Commonwealth seen such severe tornadoes in February. This tornado outbreak included two EF-3 (up to 165 mph) tornadoes, the first EF-3 tornadoes and tornado-related fatalities to occur during the month of February in the recorded history of Virginia disasters. Moreover, the Commonwealth has not experienced a tornado event this deadly since 1959.

As a result of preliminary damage assessments, the Commonwealth and impacted localities have estimated \$35,000,000 in tornado-related damages and response costs, a number

that continues to rise as recovery operations and debris removal take place. This event occurred at a time when the Commonwealth, local governments, and voluntary organizations have diminished funding and recovery capacity due to multiple preceding states of emergency over the past two years in Virginia, which have exceeded an estimated \$300,000,000 in damages and response costs.

This depletion of available government resources, combined with the trauma caused by the tornadoes, the effect on special populations, and the similar depletion of volunteer resources, has created the need for federal assistance to individuals under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121–5206 (Stafford Act). Specifically, the Commonwealth is seeking the Individual Assistance and Households Program, to include: Small Business Administration (SBA) Disaster Assistance, Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Transitional Sheltering, Disaster Case Management, Disaster Legal Services, and Crisis Counseling. We are asking for your assistance only for the most severely affected survivors of the tornado outbreak.

Psychological Trauma

The tragic deaths of 5 residents, numerous injuries, and the destruction of so many homes have had a significant psychological impact on the residents of the affected and surrounding areas. This was the deadliest tornado event in Virginia in 57 years. It has affected areas that have no experience in dealing with this kind of devastation. The first responders, county staff, and residents need help moving forward and rebuilding their lives. An Individual Assistance Major Disaster Declaration will provide for crisis counseling at the scale necessary to serve the citizens of impacted areas.

Displaced Residents

The eight tornadoes impacted 406 homes across the Commonwealth, completely destroying or causing major damage to 114 homes. This represents over \$31,500,000 in damages. As a result of the severity of these damages, more than 500 residents have been displaced. There currently is not enough available interim housing to support the needs of the displaced residents. In Essex County, at least 36 households need interim housing; however, there are only five private rental units registered with Socialserve.com, one Rural Development (RD) unit, and zero U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) units available in the county. In Appomattox County, at least 42 households will need interim housing; however, there are only five private rental units registered with Socialserve.com, five RD units, and zero HUD units available in the county. Sussex County is the only severely affected locality that has sufficient interim housing.

Because interim housing is unavailable, families have been forced to find alternate housing options, often at the expense of splitting up, with one family member moving in with friends or other family and other family members living elsewhere. Those that have nowhere to go are continuing to live in damaged structures with no substantial hope of timely relief. This situation is unsustainable for the months it will take to repair and rebuild these homes. Such large scale disruption to the lives of these community residents is causing tremendous anxiety. There

is still much concern about what to do and what comes next. Transitional Sheltering, available under Individual Assistance, would allow survivors to remain in their own communities, as families, while they attempt to rebuild their lives.

Affected Special Populations

In addition to the data already provided in the original request, I am including new information showing that Appomattox, Essex, and Sussex counties are some of the Commonwealth's most disadvantaged jurisdictions. One indicator used to assess community resilience is the percentage of students receiving free or reduced price lunches. Appomattox, Essex, and Sussex counties all have higher percentages of students receiving free or reduced price lunches than the state average.

Percentage of Students Receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunches (Virginia Department of Education, 2015)

Virginia State Average	35.89%
Appomattox County	48.24%
Essex County	62.87%
Sussex County	78.99%

Moreover, the Joint Preliminary Damage Assessment (JPDA), conducted by FEMA in the aftermath of the storm, estimated that many residents in Appomattox, Essex, and Sussex live below the poverty level. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Appomattox, Essex and Sussex counties all have a higher percentage of citizens living in poverty than the Virginia state average, ranging from 15 to 18 percent in Appomattox, 12 to 14 percent in Essex, and 22 to 24 percent in Sussex, respectively.

Percentage of Residents Below the Poverty Line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year)

Virginia State Average	11.5%
Appomattox County	18.2%
Essex County	12.4%
Sussex County	22.5%

Percentage of Residents Below the Poverty Line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates)

Virginia State Average	11.8%
Appomattox County	15.1%
Essex County	14.5%
Sussex County	23.9%

Based on health care data compiled by the University of Richmond in 2013, Appomattox, Essex, and Sussex counties also have significant numbers of citizens with access and functional

needs, including physical impairments, developmental challenges, and elderly. These residents have a greater need for assistance that can be provided by the FEMA Individual Assistance program.

**Percentage of Residents with Access and Functional Needs
(U.S. Census Bureau, 2013)**

Appomattox County	32%
Essex County	37%
Sussex County	42%

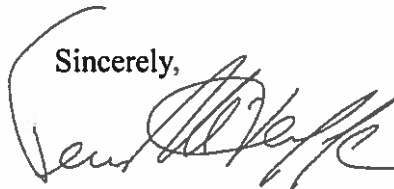
Limited Voluntary Organization Capacity

Although Virginia has a robust non-profit network through our Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) group, the number of recent disasters across the Commonwealth, and the widespread nature of the tornado outbreak, has limited their abilities to provide services to survivors. VOAD members have continued trying to provide services and fill gaps until federal assistance might be made available; however, significant unmet needs remain across the impacted counties.

I trust this additional information, and the original documentation provided in my first letter to you, makes it clear how deeply these tornadoes cut into the fabric of these communities. The road to recovery remains difficult for many in the Commonwealth, but we are hopeful that survivors will be helped through your assistance. In addition to the physical scars, these tornadoes have also left psychological and social scars in these communities. The assistance that you can provide—including the unique housing assistance, crisis counseling, and disaster case management from FEMA—will be a critically important element to the health, safety, and welfare of our residents, and their long-term recovery and resilience.

The Commonwealth's need for assistance in the aftermath of these historic tornadoes is substantiated by facts. Consequently, I urge you to reconsider your decision and approve a Major Disaster Declaration for Individual Assistance in Appomattox, Essex, and Sussex counties, and statewide Hazard Mitigation.

Sincerely,



Terence R. McAuliffe

TRM/jds